


INAUGURAL ADDRESS
OF
Hon. Benjamin A. Cook
MAYOR

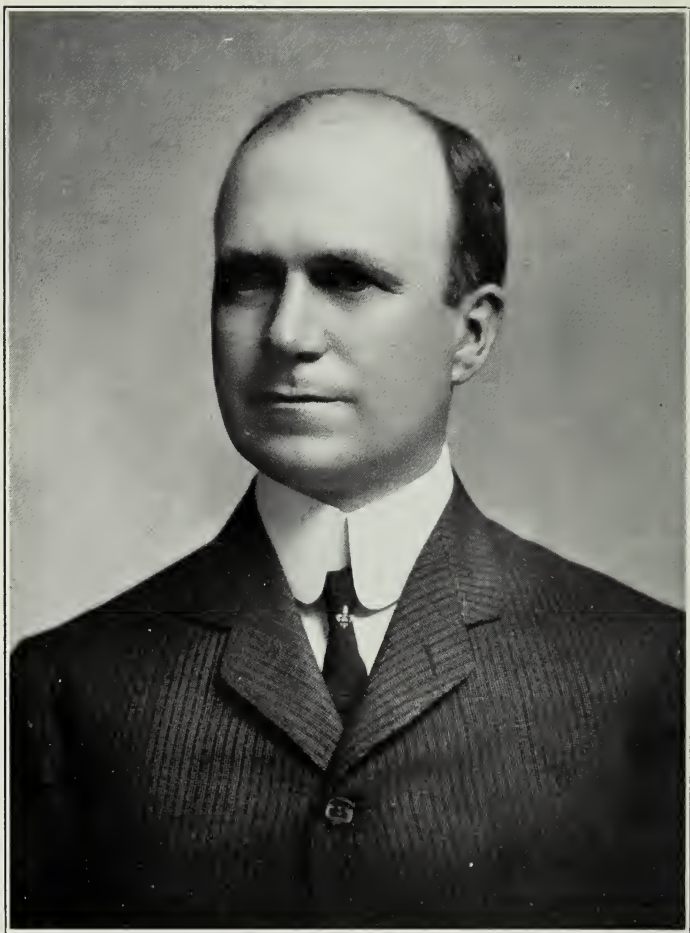


FITCHBURG, MASSACHUSETTS
1914



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HON. BENJAMIN A. COOK
Mayor of Fitchburg

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MAYOR OF FITCHBURG

1914



FITCHBURG
Sentinel Printing Company
1914

CITY OF FITCHBURG.

IN CITY COUNCIL, January 5, 1914.

Ordered: That the Mayor be requested to furnish forthwith a copy of his Inaugural Address for publication, and that the City Clerk be and hereby is instructed to cause one hundred copies thereof to be published for the use of the City Council.

Attest:

WALTER A. DAVIS,
City Clerk.

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Mayor's Inaugural Address

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

HON. BENJAMIN A. COOK

Gentlemen of the City Council:

From a viewpoint of over forty years of our life as a city, we can see in retrospect a broad highway of earnest endeavor, an ever-widening pathway of honorable and civic progression—a course at times beset by doubts and misgivings, but ever onward, guided by the triumphs of loyalty of its people to our city, and of willing obedience to its laws—and now with the inspiration of our city's history, the fervent patriotism, the intelligent courage of those who have preceded us, in our hearts, we are assembled in accordance with law and custom to take our several oaths of office and to assume, as directed by the people, the solemn responsibilities of conducting the business affairs of our honored city.

Rarely, if ever, in the history of our city has there been such widespread public interest manifested by all our citizens as at the present time. Never has it been so apparent that the practical voter was so thoroughly in earnest concerning public questions vital to his interest as today. Never has the voter been less inclined to heed the instructions of party leaders in municipal affairs. This is indeed gratifying, and such action conforms to modern usage in the conduct of municipal business, and indicates as in no other way that we as citizens are eventually to come into our heritage—a city government responsible directly to the people and for the benefit of the whole people without regard to party.

As directors of our municipal corporation we are confronted by several grave problems, chief of which is, how

to carry on the work of our various departments in a progressive way, and to continue to live within an income based on a just and reasonable tax rate. This is an age of rapid progression, and people look for accomplishment along progressive ways. The reactionary has little consideration by the majority, yet it must be constantly borne in mind that our income is limited by our tax rate, and that while our city's progress must not be hampered by penurious policy, it is only by the most careful conservation of our resources—the constant application of the axiom that “every dollar expended must bring a dollar of value,” as far as our abilities and the circumstances under which we are placed permit, that we can give each department sufficient funds for its proper maintenance, unless the people are cheerfully willing to pay a higher tax rate, which is hardly probable.

The increase in our population, the activity of our diversified manufacturing interests, the constant and just demands of our people for the extension of our educational facilities, the requirements for better highways and lighting, and other needs, would prompt the recommendation of many improvements if the present revenue or the prospective revenue of the city was such as to justify them. We must remember, however, that our city has progressed by the application of sound business principles, and thereby we have had, in the past, to wait for many improvements until we could afford them. We must bear in mind also that the Commonwealth is forcing many new expenses upon us, whether or not they may seem desirable to us. Such necessary improvements, however, as may seem justified by our condition at the present time I shall not hesitate to recommend.

It is the province of the city council to appropriate money. The personnel of these boards is such that we may all look to them for the exemplification of good judgment in the exercise of these duties. I urge their constant watchfulness.

It has been said that “In almost everything, experience is more valuable than precept,” and I deem it reasonable, therefore, in this inaugural, not to make many public recommendations; but I shall, gentlemen, at various intervals during the year, make such suggestions to you in

the transaction of municipal business as may seem expedient and useful. In this connection I desire to call your earnest attention to the city's resources and financial condition.

FINANCES.

By a combination of circumstances over which no person or group of persons has control, our expenses have increased to a point where danger signals are obvious even to those unaccustomed to study our city's finances. Under the careful and conservative management of my predecessor and his associates, there was at the end of the financial year of 1912 a surplus of practically \$21,000. Notwithstanding the same careful management during the past year, the additional calls upon the city's funds have been such that we find at the end of this year there is reported to be a corresponding balance of practically \$2500, which indicates that the city's income under a \$20 tax rate has not been sufficient by about \$18,500 to cover the expenditures which have been found necessary during the past year.

There are conditions that preclude the hope of less expense in certain departments during the coming year: for instance, the increase of salaries and wages which became operative the latter part of last year in both the school and highway departments, indicates that the expense of those departments will be materially increased for the year to come. I call your attention also to the extra necessary expense entailed by the payment of principal and interest on account of the sewer loan, which in excess of last year's expense in the same items will amount to approximately \$15,000. In this connection let me say that, provided the sewage disposal plant is ready for practical operation in September next, as predicted, there will be an added expense to cover the maintenance of this disposal plant estimated at \$40 per day, or at the rate of \$15,000 per year. Again, the increased expense that is required of us by the Commonwealth on account of the act to provide for suitably aiding mothers with dependent children will, it is estimated, increase the expense of our poor department to the extent of \$4000 to \$6000 per annum.

By state law we are required, and the city has already provided a tuberculosis hospital, the maintenance of which also requires a new outlay. There are also other added expenses which I will not take time to mention. Improvements and projects like these, however, mark the progress of the community and are required by the spirit of the times, and I simply mention these facts and conditions to indicate to you by what rapid strides the city's expenses are increasing, and to indicate to the taxpayers that an increased burden of taxes will be theirs unless extensive improvements are curtailed or some way can be found to reduce expenses in directions other than these just mentioned.

These are matters, however, squarely up to the taxpayers, and as their representatives and servants I urge you to be alert and quick to respond to their desires.

SCHOOLS.

The superintendent of schools reports that there is ample accommodation for lower grade schools as the schools are organized today, but that there is urgent need of additional room for the high school. The present high school building was built to accommodate 850 pupils. The school numbers this year 950. It numbered 350 when it was placed in the building it now occupies. The superintendent, basing his estimate upon conditions that prevail at the present time, and legislative action that is contemplated, is of the opinion that one year from now there will be 1050 pupils in the school, and that within three or four years the school will number at least 1200. Much depends upon this contemplated action. The matter of expense enters largely into the consideration of this question. It may be expected that the school board will present to the city council plans for increased facilities for the school. It is hoped that the question of expenditure will be carefully considered. A feeling of uncertainty prevails relative to what may be demanded, both with regard to legislative enactment and the demands of the public with reference to industrial training and other features of school work, and in view of such conditions it may be deemed prudent to make temporary arrangements for relief while permanent plans are being formulated.

There seems to be no doubt that the time is coming, sooner or later, when expenditure more or less extraordinary will be required in furnishing additional facilities for the higher grades of school.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT.

There is no department the natural working of which is more plainly to be observed, or more subject to criticism by the public, than the highway department. There is no department where our needs are greater in proportion to our ability of fulfillment. The profile of our streets, of which it is said that "one-half run up hill and the other half run down," makes them exceedingly expensive to maintain. Under present law the management of this department is not under control of the mayor or council: it is useless, therefore, to make suggestions to you concerning the same. You have authority only to vote appropriations and order construction work, its efficient accomplishment lies with the highway commission. It is for you to designate new construction work in such way as to have something to show for it, and to lay out new streets with careful foresight for the city's interests. It should be remembered that expensive macadam or paving should not be designated for streets liable to be torn up by the sewer department in the necessary process of the separation of storm water and house drainage, the work of which in our principal streets will soon begin.

LIQUOR LICENSES.

For the seventh consecutive year the people have voted for license and this year by substantial majority, an indication that they are reasonably satisfied with the present method of handling the question. I expect licensees to observe carefully the laws laid down for them regarding the sale of intoxicating liquors; on the other hand, legalized liquor dealers should have the protection and consideration belonging to them under the law.

POLICE DEPARTMENT.

The real test of value of a police department lies in its constant achievement of efficient service, and its work, it should be borne in mind, is always before the public eye.

Semi-military as it is in its character and duties, the maintenance of strict discipline, as well as coordinate work of its members, is absolutely necessary to its usefulness. No department of administration requires more constant exercise of intelligent action, good judgment and common sense than the police department. The citizens of Fitchburg have become accustomed to consider our guardians of the peace, in the main, as loyal, efficient and faithful, and as a department, a credit to itself and to the city.

PARKS.

By the generous action of Hon. Arthur H. Lowe and the late Mr. Henry F. Coggs hall, together with the public spiritedness of our citizens generally, Fitchburg now stands the third in New England as a city of parks and playgrounds. We have at present eleven parks and city greens, six of which are really parks; the other five might more properly be called resting places. We have also seven playgrounds. During the last year the daily average attendance at our parks and playgrounds has been 1600, the weekly average 9000. This shows that the people are really availing themselves of the opportunities for recreation which the city provides, and that the opportunities for wholesome and healthful outdoor pleasures are appreciated. As soon as we may, the further development of Coggs hall park should have attention.

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

We have learned to look with confidence upon this department, and with the acquisition of the new combination chemical engine and hose motor car recently arranged for, to be used at central station, I believe the department will then be in excellent condition. While the first cost of this apparatus is considerable, the up-keep account as handled by this department is exceedingly small, and much less than the present horse-drawn apparatus. There is, of course, no comparison as to the efficiency. I consider it good judgment to maintain, and increase when necessary, the efficiency of this important branch of our public service.

WATER DEPARTMENT.

An abundant supply of pure water is of inestimable value to the growth and prosperity of any city and to the health of its people. Fitchburg has thus far been fortunate in this respect. We shall soon, however, be confronted by the problem of increasing our water supply to meet the demand of a fast-growing population and an ever-increasing number of manufacturing establishments. Steps have already been taken to secure more water rights by legislative action, and before the year is passed you will probably be called to take action on the same. I urge your most careful consideration of this very important question.

ASSESSMENT OF TAXES.

A just and fair assessment of taxes is due all our taxpayers, and the burden of taxation should be borne by all in reasonable proportion. If there is any improved method whereby values can be determined more concisely and equitably than under the system in present use by our assessors, I feel that same should be adopted.

There are other worthy administrative departments of our city upon which no comment will be made at this time, for the reason that conditions seem satisfactory and no special changes have been suggested.

IN CONCLUSION.

Gentlemen, our duty now is fairly before us and it lies in making "what ought to be done our first business." Let us meet such issues as may arise in a fearless and non-partisan way, cooperating together for the welfare of the whole city.

Permit me a personal word, that I may express my grateful appreciation to the citizens of Fitchburg for their splendid endorsement. Its value is enhanced because of the knowledge that it came from all our people and from all sections of the city. It shall be my most earnest endeavor, with the coöperation of your city council, to give Fitchburg, from border to border, a sane and progressive administration.



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